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HIS MOTHER

HARVEY J. O'HIGGINS

HIS MOTHER

BY

HARVEY J. O'HIGGINS

Author of "Don-a-Dreams," "The
Smoke Eaters," "Old Clinkers."

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HIS MOTHER

I

MRS. REGAN was at the front window of her tenement-house flat, watching. She was not beautiful. Her eyes were sunken and beady under the worried wrinkles of her forehead; her high-boned cheeks would remind you of the corners of a battered leather trunk; her withered old mouth was drawn as tightly shut as if she were holding pins between her lips. And yet, in those eyes, about that mouth, there was an expression of anxious and loving expectation that was more beautiful than beauty, because it was so human, because it had that endearing ugliness of worn life. She was watching for Larry—her son Larry!—and she kept saying to herself: "He's late.. I wonder what's keepin' him."

HIS

MOTHER

He was twenty-odd, a typesetter by trade, "a sober, law-fearin' good lad"—as she would boast—who neither smoked nor drank nor used bad language ("except now an' then, mebbe, when he forgets I'm in hearin'")—and who brought his money home to her on pay-days "as reg'lar, come Friday, as Friday comes." She had worked her hands "to the bone" to give him his "schoolin'," in the days when he, after school hours, used to go on the streets to shine shoes or sell newspapers or do whatever else came to hand to earn an honest penny. She was working for him still, but no longer going out scrubbing and taking in washing and stitching ulsters at night on a sewing-machine at twenty cents an ulster. (It was the machine that had made her voice so loud; she had been used to talking while she worked.) Now she sat at home "like a lady," and only sewed and mended and cooked and scrubbed and swept and dusted and washed for him—and only sat up late at night till he had gone to bed, so that she might tuck him in; for she believed that if she did not watch him so, he would be sure to kick the covers off his legs in the night, like a big baby, and catch his "death o' cold."

"He's late," she said, for the twentieth time. "I wonder what's keepin' him."

She would see him as soon as he turned the street corner far below her, and she would hurry back to the kitchen where the dinner was all ready to be whisked out of the oven to the table. As soon as he opened the door of the flat, she would call, "Is that yerself?" and he would reply with a cheerful grunt of assent. ("He never talks till he's fed—poor boy.") There would be no kisses, no embraces of affection, no show of love between them. Her pot pie, her biscuits, and her English breakfast tea "with a pinch o' Paykoe in it" were her caresses; she would ply him with them, beaming on him fondly, every "helping," affectionate and every bite

grateful; and his final sigh of repletion would be as eloquent to her as the aspiration of a full heart.

HIS
MOTHER

She would have to tell him all the gossip of the neighborhood—where she knew everybody's troubles, because everybody came to her to borrow a little assistance in bearing them. ("Yuh can have annything I've got to spare," she would tell them. "Many's the time when I had nothin', I wisht I c'u'd borry it meself.") And he would read the newspapers and listen to her talk—both at the one time—and if there was anyone happier than Mrs. Regan then, it was some one who had no right to be. She was sure of that.

"He's late," she said. "I wonder—there now!"

It was he.

She did not wait to wave him a greeting. She ran to the kitchen and caught up her towel, all her anxieties forgotten on the instant. And it was with no resentful impatience that she cried, "Is that yerself?" when she heard the door open.

"Sure," he answered. "How've you been?"

She looked back quickly over her shoulder as she measured her drawing of tea. (She said afterward: "As soon as he opened his mouth, I knowed there was somethin' wrong.") She heard him coming down the little hall to her; and he should have gone to wash. "Dinner's ready," she assured him.

He said: "So'm I."

He had a parcel in his hand. He tossed it upon the kitchen table.

"What's that?" she asked.

He answered: "Open it and see."

She was not only mystified; she was naturally somewhat alarmed. And his casual explanations, as she untied the string, did not reassure her. (He had seen "it" on the street. A push-cart peddler had had it. He had thought she might like it.)

It was a white crocheted "umbrella" shawl.

She spread it out, half-flattered, uneasy, touched by his thought for her, but uncertain how to take it.

HIS "There now," she reproached him, "Why 'd yuh
MOTHER waste yer money?"

He laughed shamefacedly and went back toward his bedroom.

He knew that she would fold the shawl away in a bureau drawer, and show it to her visitors as a "present from Larry," and perhaps on some special occasion wear it with all the pride in the world. He did not know that after he left her, she returned to her tea-making so absent-mindedly puzzled to know what was "up" that she forgot to put in the extra spoonful 'fer the pot."

Her suspicions were not allayed by his talkativeness at the table, for she knew him well enough to understand that whenever he had anything on his conscience he was always instinctively ingratiating and good-humored. She said little; she listened without betraying herself; she watched him furtively with her sharp old eyes. But she saw nothing in his talk until he had finished telling her about the opening of the new subway from Brooklyn Bridge to Harlem. Then—having pushed away his plate and tilted back his chair comfortably—he said: "We could get a fine big flat uptown for what we pay here. It wouldn't take me any longer to get home, either, now. We don't have to live down here. We could move for next to nothing—five or ten dollars."

He had evidently been leading up to that proposal, diplomatically; and with equal diplomacy she evaded it. She did not reply that this was her home; that all her friends were about her here; that the church in which she had been married, in which he had been christened, in which she had heard mass for the last thirty years, was just around the corner—to say nothing of her grocer and her butcher! She suggested merely: "Yuh'd miss the boys."

This referred to the younger members of the Dan Healy Democratic Association in which he was

a stalwart. "Oh, well," he said, easily, "I've been thinking of giving all that up any way. There's nothing in it for me. I've got my work. I don't need to live off politics. I've sort of cut it out lately."

HIS
MOTHER

For some weeks past he had been going out every night; and he had let her suppose that he was spending his evenings in the rooms of the association, helping to prepare for the coming campaign. She rose to clear the table, so that, under cover of the activity, she might have time to think.

"I met the Senator on the street to-day," he said, "and told him."

"Told him what?"

"That I was quitting politics."

She put down her dishes. "Fer the love o' Heaven, why?"

"Well," he said, "I been thinking it over. It's all right—but it ain't straight. They're a nice lot of fellahs, but they're in wrong." He was a big, dark-faced Irish boy, deep-eyed, with a gaze that was calmly direct. "I want to keep clear of it. That's why I want to get uptown out of this."

"They've been good frien's to us, Larry. Many's the dollar Senator Dan——"

"I know all abt it that. I've tried to make it up to him. I've done things for him I wouldn't've done for anybody else—around the polls. I won't do it any more."

"Are yuh sore 'cause yuh didn't get Flanagan's place?"

"Sore? No, I'm darned glad I didn't get it."

"What's come over yuh, then?"

"Well," he said, vaguely, "I've been meeting people—another sort of people. I've been seeing things diff'rent."

She realized, then, that she was facing a crisis in his life greater than any she had had to deal with since the day when he had wished to leave school so that she might not have to work so hard for

HIS
MOTHER

him. The boy was wanting to take his life into his own hands again, to turn against his politics, his class and all his old associations. So much she understood with a mother's jealous instinct, instantly, though she did not accuse him of understanding it himself. He had been influenced by someone. She set herself to find out who it was.

She asked: "Are yuh goin' out to-night?"

He accepted the question with relief. "I thought I would—a little while. I'll be back early." He sat with his elbows on the table. "I promised I'd see some one."

She turned her back craftily before she asked: "Can't yuh bring him here?"

"Well, not very well," he said. "It's a girl."

He tried to give it in a matter-of-fact tone, but he did not succeed. She tried to receive it in a matter-of-fact manner, and she was more successful. She kept her back to him and continued with her work, only glancing at the shawl with her lips tightened. A girl!

It was her opinion that every girl in the town was a designing hypocrite who was bent upon flattering Larry into marrying her so that she might not have to work for a living. Not one of the whole useless set would know how to cook for him. Not one would be able to do anything but spend his money in clothes for herself and ruin his digestion with stuff bought at delicatessen counters, and with her folly and extravagance worry him to death.

It is a mortifying thing to raise a boy to the lovable helplessness of manhood only to have him taken advantage of by one of your own sex. She said angrily: "Are y' ashamed to show her?"

After a moment of silence, he replied: "All right, then. I'll bring her." And rising abruptly from the table, he stalked into the front room and sat down at the window.

She did not need any further proof that the girl had caught him, for he was not the sort of boy to

bring any young woman to see her unless he had **HIS**
been already committed, in his own mind, to matrimony. The prospect of his death itself would **MOTHER**
hardly have been less welcome to her; and yet the
hardening of her face and a little trembling of her
hands as she took up the dishes were the only signs
she showed of her emotion. (He was going to
marry! She would have to share Larry with a
strange woman—if he did not desert her altogether.)

She continued her work, all the joy of it gone
from her, miserable, but bearing her misery dumbly.
She did not even ask him who the girl was. (What
did it matter who it was?) She tidied up her
kitchen determinedly. "She'll not find the place
dirty when she comes," she promised herself—
reserving an opinion of what it would be like before
the girl had been long in charge of it. And when
Larry had dressed and gone out, she attacked the
little front room with the same thought—arranging
the folds in her lace curtains to conceal patching,
and covering the delinquencies of her "crimson
plush" with a cushion here and a tidy there, and
dusting the paper fans and the framed photograph
in its red-velvet mat, and assuring herself that the
block of wood was safely supporting the back leg of
the easy chair that had lost a caster. "They'll be
gettin' new," she prophesied. She herself had clung
to the old, even when Larry had wished to be rid
of them. ("There's nothin' so comfort'ble to set in
as an ol' chair," she would say, "unless 'tis an ol'
boot.") She was old herself. Well, he would soon
learn whether the new was better! She shook her
head prophetically. He would soon learn whether
the new was better.



That mood passed, and a more characteristic one succeeded it.

She knew the girl would be some "gum-chewin' young gad-about with no more than brains enough to dress herself like a fool." A shop-girl, no doubt—a shop-girl that carried all her wages on her back and walked with a wiggle! There were no girls, no more, like the girls of her day. Never a one. Now, they went to work in offices instead of staying home and learning the things a girl ought to know. They made poor wives and worse mothers; they were half of them sickly and all of them silly; they knew no more about their proper business in life than a peacock knows about hatching duck's eggs.

She muttered and grumbled it over and over while she dressed—angry at herself now, because she had dared Larry to bring the girl. What could she say to the fool creature? Let him marry her and go off with her out of this. She could take care of herself—and that's all she would do. She didn't want to see the girl. Why should she? Drat the young snip. Who wanted to listen to her cackle? If Larry liked it, let him take it and live with it. There was no accounting for tastes. Larry!—of all boys in the world! Well, live and learn, live and learn.

She plumped herself down in her rocking chair by the window and waited indignantly for them to come. She looked very sour, very stiff and forbidding. Hard work had kept her thin and angular. She snorted and muttered to herself.

And she was still in this frame of mind when the arrival of Larry and his "girl" brought her to her feet. "Now, then," she said, "now then."

There entered a meekly dressed young woman, about thirty years old, tall, in black, with a plain pale face and a subdued manner. "Miss McCarty," Larry introduced her, very proud and somewhat apprehensive. ("God help us," Mrs. Regan said

afterward, "I thought 'twas a joke he was playin'. She was nothin' at all to look at. An' old enough to marry two of him!") He did not notice how his mother received Miss McCarty; he was only anxious about how Miss McCarty would be impressed. And the mother received her as a rival who, at first sight, disproved all the formidable reports concerning her; and Miss McCarty showed no more impression than is indicated by the deepening of reserve.

HIS
MOTHER

She had a broad, flat forehead; and her eyes were set under it, far apart and colorless, with a quiet despondency of expression. Her mouth had the same flatness—a wide mouth, thin-lipped and full of the character of a woman who has a mind of her own. When she sat down she folded in her lap a pair of immaculate hands, large, firm, very white, and evidently very capable. Her physical largeness was obviously of the same quality of graceful strength.

"Well, now!" Mrs. Regan said, at last. "Will yuh tell me somethin'? Wherever did yuh meet?" Her excitement gave her voice the shrillness that made her sound shrewish to those who did not know her.

"Downtown," Larry answered, with his eyes still fixed on the girl.

"Do yuh work?" the mother asked her.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I've always worked." And she spoke in the voice that had glamored Larry.

It was not the voice of a dialect; it was not even markedly the plaintive intonation of the Celt. It was a rich full breathing of deepened vowels and blurred consonants that put a sort of pastoral gentleness and charm on every word—as soft as an Irish mist on the green undulations of an Irish landscape.

"What do yuh do?" Mrs. Regan demanded.

Larry answered for her: "She's a manicurist."

"A— What's that?" she cried, annoyed because the girl had an appearance of ignoring her.

**HIS
MOTHER**

Larry laughed nervously. Miss McCarty, it was evident to him, did not understand the brusque kindness of his mother's inquiries. "Never mind what it is," he said. "What difference does it make?"

Mrs. Regan contained herself by folding her arms upon her pride. "True enough," she said. "What difference? 'Tis none o' my bus'ness. None at all." And with that she assumed an attitude of silent self-suppression that was comical—as well as tragic.

"It only took us twenty minutes to get down to Fourteenth Street from a Hundred and Third," Larry told her.

"Did it," she said, shortly.

"Lots of flats to rent up there."

She said nothing.

"Better air, too."

With one hand supporting an elbow, she fingered her lips as if she were fingering a padlock on them. Miss McCarty was very repudially looking aside out of the window. Larry tried to make talk.

The end of it came when the girl, having carried on five minutes' futile conversation with him—about flats, comparative rents and the possible construction of more subways—rose placidly to say good night; and Mrs. Regan awoke, too late, to the inhospitality of her behavior.

"Yuh're never goin' so soon!" she cried. "Wait a bit. Have a cup o' tea now." The girl refused firmly, but Mrs. Regan hurried out to the kitchen to put on the kettle and open the cake box. She heard Larry call out something which she did not understand. And when she returned with her pewter cake-basket and her tray of cups, the room was empty.

They had gone.

She went back to the kitchen, thumped the cake into the box, banged the basket down on the table, and snatched the kettle from the stove. "There!"

she said. "Now!" And seating herself in the chair by the fire-escape window she began to weep.

HIS
MOTHER

She had done it. She had quarreled with them. The girl would take Larry away from her. It was the end of everything!

III

Larry had first seen Miss McCarty in a downtown barber shop—and if he had not hung up his hat before he had seen her, he would have backed out of the place. As it was, he had taken his seat in the chair nearest her with an uncomfortable feeling that she had intruded upon his toilet. She was manicuring at a little table near the door.

"Hair cut," he said, in a husky undertone, and felt like a fool when the barber swathed him in striped calico and tucked it in around his neck. It was no position for a man to be seen in by any young woman. In the best of circumstances hair-cutting was to Larry an operation of personal beautification that was to be rushed through with a scornful lack of attention; he would scarcely look at himself in the glass until he could do it alone and unashamed (and curse the barber who had made the parting an inch too high on his head). And now, when his hair had been ruffled up unbecomingly, he kept darting irritated glances at her out of the corner of his eye, to see that she was not staring at him.

She was polishing the fingernails of a man who had his back to Larry, so that Larry could not see his face. It was enough for him to see hers. (Not that she was beautiful—or even an interesting ugliness. He thought her merely plain looking, with a nose too large.) What he saw in her face was the evidence that her customer was annoying her; and as Larry watched her, he added his irritated embarrassment about his own toilet to an accession

**HIS
MOTHER**

of uncultured contempt for the man who could loiter back, ogling, in a barber shop, while a woman polished his nails.

The barber slewed Larry's head around—first this way and then that way—with the masterful hand of his trade; and Larry caught but fleeting glimpses of the girl's reddened ears and frigid haughtiness. The man was leaning forward on one elbow, a roll of flesh bulging above his collar. Larry's slanted eye fixed on that fat roll malevolently for a moment before the barber swung him around again. And when he was sheared and sleeked down with bay rum and out of the chair finally, he reached for his hat—with his eyes on the remembered neck—just as the girl, dropping her chamois pad, looked up appealingly at the barber as if for aid against insult.

Larry stepped forward, jabbed his fingers in between the neck and the collar and raised the man with one hand while he withdrew the chair with the other. (The tightened collar prevented any but a guttural, choked outcry.) Larry jerked him clear of the table and propelled him swiftly toward the screen door, shoved him through that, ran him across the sidewalk, and there, bumping him behind with a bent knee, sent him sprawling into the gutter. Then, without any undignified haste, but with sufficient celerity, he shouldered his way through the midday crowd on Broadway, turned a corner, and hurried back to his work.

He had almost forgotten the incident before he saw her again. He had not gone near the barber shop, meanwhile. He had not given her a thought—except a vaguely resentful one. And when he met her face to face in City Hall Park, he was not sure where he had seen her before. She said, quite frankly and unembarrassed: "I want to thank you. Don't you remember me?"

"Sure I do," he replied, and he did not say it flippantly. She had spoken in that wonderful voice of hers, and it had made him respectful at once.

He turned back with her, and she accepted his escort as a matter of course. They said nothing of any importance; they parted at the step of the "El." in Park Place, with a nod and a smile; and Larry was half way back to his own station of the Third Avenue Elevated at Brooklyn Bridge before it occurred to him that he would like to see her again and had not provided the opportunity of doing so.

The omission made it necessary for him to stand opposite the barber shop, next noon, and wait for her to come out for luncheon.

There is, in such affairs, an unwritten code that prohibits the asking of personal questions. The young man must accept the young woman "sight unseen"—as the boys say when they "swap" with their hands behind them—until the first trial of acquaintance has been proven. Then, if the interest becomes serious, mutual confidences are naturally exchanged, the right to receive them having been established. It was for this reason that even after Larry and she had gone to the theaters together, sat in the parks, and patronized the museums of art and of natural history—which a thoughtful public has erected for the use of New York lovers who need sheltered benches on wet Sunday afternoons—he knew as little about her past, her parentage and the private circumstances of her life as she knew about his. She remained placid, uncoquettish and still reserved with the reserve of a woman whose voice was not made for chatter. (That voice haunted him. He heard it even in the midst of the crashed metallic tinklings of the linotypes.)

Then, one evening, when he called upon her by appointment to take her to the theater, she did not meet him at the door of the flat-house; and he ascended to the top floor apartment to find her with a headache and unwilling to go out. She was sharing the flat with two friends—one a head waitress in a dairy restaurant, the other a black-haired little Socialist who was trying to organize a union among

**HIS
MOTHER**

the shop-girls of a department store where she worked. And it was here that Larry began to "see things diff'rent" (as he told his mother) in the matter of politics. Here, too, he got another impression of Miss McCarty, from the deference which her two room mates showed her and the air of right with which she accepted it—to say nothing of the graceful dignity of the way in which she reclined upon a shabby corner couch and listened to the argument between Larry and the Socialist.

She gave him an impression not only of superior experience and superior age, but even of superior culture; and when he left her that night he had an uneasy suspicion that she was, perhaps, "above" him.

He was ambitious. He was also proud—as proud as his mother. And when he came to ask the girl to call on Mrs. Regan with him, he gave the invitation as if it were a defiance. She accepted it—after a moment's reflection—with some of that feminine, Old-World dignity that refuses to recognize a lover until he makes his formal declaration.

It was this dignity that carried her through the interview with Mrs. Regan outwardly unmoved; and it was this dignity that sat so stiff upon her as she journeyed back to One Hundred and Third Street with Larry, in the roaring subway, after she had refused Mrs. Regan's cup of tea. There was nothing to say; the noise about them, in any case, prevented them from saying anything; and Larry waited until they were in the street before he even asked when he might see her again.

She replied calmly: "I don't know."

"Will you come to—to the theatre to-morrow night?"

"No, thank you," she said.

"Why?"

Her manner replied that she did not feel he had any claim upon her that would justify the question. She looked straight ahead of her in silence.

Larry put his hands in his coat pockets, with the air of a boy who has been insulted and who puts away his fists temporarily until he can make sure that the insult was intended. He asked: "Don't you want me to come to see you?"

"I think not," she said, in her smoothest voice. "No."

Larry took her to her door without another word. He stopped on the pavement. "Good night," he challenged.

She looked back over her shoulder as she took the first step. "Good-by," she replied, cheerfully; and it was a cheerfulness that only made finality sound more final.

Larry nodded briefly and turned away. And to match the finality in her cheerfulness, there was, in his nod of dismissal, an anger that was as implacable as an Irish hate.

IV.

Mrs. Regan, when he returned to the flat, had apparently gone to bed, but after he was in bed himself she came to his room in her blue flannel wrapper with a light, to make her peace with him; and he pretended that he was asleep, lying very stiffly on his back with his eyes shut, in an attitude that would not have deceived the blind. There was nothing for her to do but to go back to her misery and lie awake with it, staring at a darkness that was as black as her future to her. (She had quarreled with Larry. Oh, dear—oh, dear!)

When he came to his breakfast, next morning, he had his eyes open—to be sure—but otherwise his mental attitude seemed to be unchanged. He ate his breakfast—which she laid before him as humbly as if it were an altar sacrifice—and he spoke to her in a voice that was only too well controlled. But he did not meet her anxious penitent glances, and when he went away to his work he left her to as unhappy a day as any that her husband had ever

MOTHER

given her. (She had quarreled with Larry! He would be leaving her. It was all over.)

She prepared for him, broken-heartedly, a lavish dinner of stuffed heart and mashed potatoes; and he came home earlier than usual to eat it with what she mistook for signs of a better feeling toward herself. That night, to her surprise, he did not go out; he read his newspaper and re-read it and read it again, until it was evident to her that he was reading the same pages twice without knowing it. She watched him—but without gathering any idea of what was going on in his mind.

And she watched him all next day (which was Sunday) without understanding his lack-luster mood, his absent-mindedness and his gentleness toward herself. He did not go out; he sat gloomily indoors; and when he proposed a street-car ride in the cool of the evening, she went with him, in a remorseful state of wonder.

At last, when she could bear it no longer, she asked: "What's becomin' o' the girl that yuh don't take her?"

"Her," he said bitterly. "We're not good enough for her."

"An' why not?" she cried.

"I don't know," he answered, in a tone hard and even. "And I don't care."

"There now!" Mrs. Regan addressed herself aloud. "What d' yuh think o' that?" She stared at him, turning in her seat, with such an expression of bewilderment that he asked, sourly: "What's the matter?"

"Nothin'," she said, collecting herself. "Nothin' at all."

But throughout the silence in which they finished their car ride, she kept saying to herself in her thoughts: 'What d' yuh think o' that? An' me thinkin' he was mad at me an' goin' to leave me fer the girl. . . . What d' yuh think o' that? The likes o' her! The likes o' her to be

puttin' him down! Him—that was worth a dozen of her. It's enough to make the saints in heaven laugh at their prayers. . . . Glory be to Peter! What d' yuh think o' that?" Amusement and indignation alternated with amazement and relief. She was not going to lose Larry—but the likes of her! Not good enough for her. Did anyone ever hear anything to equal that? The fool of a girl! What were they coming to nowadays—the girls—any way? She could have chuckled with contempt for them, if it had not been that Larry would have heard. Larry was evidently in no frame of mind to hear laughter.

HIS MOTHER

He continued in a mood—or rather in and out of a number of moods—which she did not find herself able to follow. In accordance with the best traditions of the poets, he lost his appetite—like all young people crossed in love—but only because he had developed in its place a worried indigestion that made him irritable instead of languishing and lackadaisical. He had decided that Miss McCarty had thrown him over because, after seeing his mother and his home, she had found them—and him—"beneath" her; and one night he would bring his mother home the gifts of a resentful pride in her, and the next night he would be querulous and sharp, and handle the furniture as if he could scarcely restrain himself from throwing it out the window. He would come to his breakfast with a melancholy lover's distaste for food; and after his eggs and coffee, he would be ready to boil over with ill-temper at a word. He was sick and despondent, bilious and bad-natured, fiercely proud and for the most part quite impossible.

His mother did everything to tempt his appetite with rich dishes that only made him the more dyspeptic. She tried to please him by proposing that they move to a flat uptown and buy a "bran' new" set of furniture that she had seen; and this proposal found him in one of his proud moods and made him furious. She almost wept over his gifts—

**HIS
MOTHER**

beginning to have a glimmering suspicion of why he bought them—and he was so indignant that he swore he would never bring her another. "Well, love o' heaven!" she cried, at last. "There's no livin' with y' at all! What is it? What's wrong with yuh? If yuh want the girl, why don't yuh go get her? God give her joy o' yuh! Yuh're worse 'n a bear with a sore ear!"

"What're you talking about?" He glared at her. "Who said I wanted her? I'm done with her—and she knows it! I wouldn't look at her if she—" He choked wrathfully.

"Well, then," she complained, "what is it? What's the matter? I can do nothin' with yuh."

"Who asked you to? Leave me alone. I'm all right. Only you're always making out that I'm—she—as if I was gone nutty about her. I don't care a darn about her. I'm as good as she is. If she thinks we're not, that's her lookout. She can't bother me for a minute!"

"Ach," Mrs. Regan said, "I dunno what yuh're talkin' about. I've said nothin' about yuh bein' nutty—though, Lord knows, y' act like it."

He swallowed the insult—turned suddenly dispirited—and they let the quarrel lapse into a worried gloom until some fresh misunderstanding should arouse it again.

It summed up for her, before long, into the conclusion that the boy was ill, that he was unhappy, that he was eating out his heart—and ruining his digestion—because of a fool of a girl with whom he had quarreled. "They neither o' them 've got sense enough to know what they want! Some one ought to take an' bump their heads together fer them. Drat them both! They'll drive me out o' me wits. . . . If I had her here, now, I'd give her a talkin' to she'd not ferget to her dyin' day!"

But she did not have her there; and she had not the faintest suspicion of where to find her—until, one day, when she had been to call on a neighbor who had recently moved to One Hundred and Third

Street, she told Larry of the visit and he said: **HIS**
"Hundred and Third Street! Whereabouts?" She **MOTHER**
replied: "Near the subway. First block east." He
said: "I don't want you to be fooling around there.
It'll look as if we were trying to follow her." And
she remembered that Larry and the girl had come
down from One Hundred and Third Street in
"twenty minutes."

"Folly her!" she said, to herself. "Why should
I folly her! It's yerself that'll do anny follyin' that's
to be done, me lad. I'd look nice goin' up there fer
yuh, tryin' to patch up quarrels I know nothin' at
all about. I'd look nice."

Anyone who understood Mrs. Regan would know
that this fiercely contemptuous repudiation of any
intention of "follyin'" Miss McCarty was the first
sign of her purpose to do just that. The boy had
begun to look bad about the eyes. When his face
was in repose it took a worried wrinkle between the
eyebrows. He had moments when he was so meek
that he was as pathetic to her as if he were teething.
She could not endure it. "If I knowed what was
wrong between them," she told herself, "'twu'd not
be so bad. I'd like to see that girl. Drat her! I'd
put it to her straight."

The next time she called in One Hundred and
Third Street she examined the bells of all the apart-
ment houses in the block, and when she came to
"McCarty" she muttered: "There y' are, are yuh?
If I thought yuh were up there now—but I s'pose
yuh're at work. The devil take yuh. Do yuh go
out nights, I wonder. I s'pose yuh think I'll tell
Larry I'm goin' to church to-morra night, an' sneak
up here to see yuh? Huh! I see meself! I'd look
nice!" And turning her back resolutely, she walked
off with her chin up.

Naturally, she said nothing to Larry of that visit,
and he had no suspicion of her duplicity when she
went out on the following Saturday evening to con-
fession—it being the eve of the first Sunday of the
month—and took the subway north. ("I'll tell no

HIS
MOTHER

lies," she assured herself, "but I'd better see her first—an' confess after.") And when Miss McCarty, alone in the flat, received her with a well-controlled but evident surprise, she took the upper hand in a manner of self-justification, and demanded: "Now then! What is it all about? Tell me that, will yuh? What's wrong between yuh? Why have yuh thrown down the poor boy?"

Miss McCarty had, of course, "thrown him down" because she was too proud to intrude upon any family that did not welcome her, and Mrs. Regan, by her manner at that first meeting, had most obviously intended her to understand that she was not welcome.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked, calmly.

Mrs. Regan sat down while she was replying that she could not do so, that Larry thought she was at church, that she must hurry away, that he was ill, that he was worrying. "And why?" she cried, shrilly. "Why is it? What's wrong? I can make nothin' of it!"

Miss McCarty began to explain the situation as delicately as she could.

"Well!" Mrs. Regan broke in. "Well now! Did y' expect a woman to grin an' say 'Thank yuh kindly, miss,' when yuh come to take her son from her? Did yuh? Fer if yuh did, yuh got less sense than yuh look. Faith, if you had no one in the wide worrld but Larry, yuh'd not welcome the girl that came fer him, neither." There were tears in her eyes.

"But, Mrs. Regan," the girl put in, quickly, "there was nothing—he had never said to me that he wanted——"

"Ach!" Mrs. Regan made a gesture of contempt for such nonsense. "What does it matter what he said er didn't? There he is—like he'd just buried his gran'mother—turned against his meals—an' that bad tempered there's no livin' with him. Are we all of us to be made miserable be such like nonsense? Take shame to yerself, girl!"

"Well"—the girl smiled—"what do you want me to do?" HIS
MOTHER

"Marry him! Marry him, an' let's have some peace in the world. I don't know who y' are, an I don't care. There's no livin' with him without yuh. Take him an' be done with it. Can yuh cook?"

"Yes," she said, amused. "I think I can cook."

"Where are yuh from, annyway?"

"I'm from Dublin. I went to London as a lady's maid. I came here as a traveling companion—and didn't like it. I took up manicuring because I could do that—and couldn't do anything else."

"Have yuh no relatives? Are y' all alone here?"

"Yes. All alone—except for the girl friends I've made."

"There now," Mrs. Regan relented. "He'll make y' a good husband. He's the best boy in the world." And she launched out in a mother's eulogy of him. "Yuh're a fine big healthy-lookin' girl," she ended. "Yuh'll be happy together. I must get back now." She rose to go. "Don't tell him I've been here." She paused, frowning. "How'll I—how'll we——"

Miss McCarty kissed her. "I'll write to him. Don't worry about that. Let me take you to the subway."

"I will not," Mrs. Regan replied. "I'm not so old I can't walk alone. Good-by to you."

And when Larry, on the following Monday, had received his letter and had gone out (rather sulkily, but in his best clothes), to reply to it in person, Mrs. Regan sat down by her window with an exclamation that was between a sigh of satisfaction and a grunt of disgust. "There y' are," she told herself. "That's what it is to be a mother. 'Tain't only that yuh can't keep yer boy, but if yuh try it, y' end by goin' down on yer bare knees to the girl to marry him. A nice thing to have to be doin'! A nice thing!" She grumbled indignantly. "Well," she said, "that's what it is to be a woman an' have

HIS
MOTHER

to be lookin' after the men all yer life—an' managin' them—an' feedin' them—an' seein' they're kep' full an' happy. Faith, I wish 't I'd been born a man meself. 'T must be an easy life." She shook her head over it. "I s'pose I'll be a gran' mother, too, now, soon enough. There's no end to it. Nothin' but trouble. . . . A gran'mother. Well now!" And with that she began to smile as tenderly as if she had the baby in her arms already. "A gran'-mother. What d' yuh think o' that!"



